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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: THUMBS DOWN AND UP ON SECRETARY'S TRIP;  
PRESIDENT'S NEW IRAQ STRATEGY; PRIZE FOR OMAN'S SULTAN

11. SUMMARY: Privately owned daily "Al-Watan" denigrates Secretary's Middle East trip while state-owned "Oman" lauds it as a "vital" diplomatic initiative. "Oman" criticizes President Bush's new Iraq strategy and says that the "only choice" is a gradual troop withdrawal. "Oman" also lauds Sultan Qaboos's having received an Indian peace prize. Government dailies publish only low-key coverage of Saddam's half-brother's execution. Defense Secretary Gates' Iraq visit generates prominent coverage. END SUMMARY.

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COVERAGE  
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12. As with Saddam Hussein's execution, government-owned "Oman" (circulation 38,000) did not cover the hanging of Saddam's half-brother and the former leader of Iraq's revolutionary court during the news cycle in which the story broke. In contrast, youth-oriented "Al-Shabiba" (circulation 20,000) carried the January 16 headline, "Thirty-Seven Years of Iraq's Secrets 'Flew Away' with Barzan's Head," in reference to Barzan al-Tikriti's inadvertent decapitation. Continuing violence in Iraq received heavy coverage, as did the remarks of Defense Secretary Gates during his visit there. "Oman's" front-page headline on January 16 quoted Gates as saying that "Our Military Presence in the Gulf Is a Message to Iran," and the January 20 front page of "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) quoted the Defense Secretary's statement from Basra that "We Need More Gains before Dialogue with Iran." Palestinian negotiations to form a unity government continued to generate front-page coverage.

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BLOCK QUOTES: "TRUE" GOALS OF SECRETARY'S TRIP  
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13. On January 16, privately owned daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) described Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to the region as "Makeup for an Ugly Face":

"Condoleezza Rice came to the region empty-handed and she is leaving the same way. Rice stated that she was not carrying any new initiative but she did repeatedly call for the renewal of the 'Road Map.' She tossed around the vocabulary of America's useless initiatives that involve a temporary Palestinian state within the borders of Israel's separation fence. The true motivation for this is that Washington wants Arab countries to embrace Iraq and integrate it into the existing Arab system while ignoring the results of Washington's violent war and its strategic failures. The

actual goal of Rice's trip was to destroy Arab unity and obscure America's failure in Iraq."

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"VITAL" COMMUNICATIONS DURING SECRETARY'S VISIT  
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¶4. On January 18, state-owned daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) commented on Secretary Rice's visit under the headline, "Indications of Peace in the Middle East":

"Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's latest visit to the region and her meetings with many political leaders might be an indication that America intends to renew its efforts to solve the Palestinian issue. Her meetings with the GCC, and the foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan, were important steps toward ending the conflicts in the Middle East. Her efforts are in the best interest of all parties, Israel included. Stability in the region would end all excuses for hatred and violence, thus leading to peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Diplomatic communications at such a level are vital. Events in the near future will reveal how effective such efforts have been."

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"FAILURE" OF PRESIDENT'S NEW IRAQ STRATEGY  
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¶5. On January 23, "Oman" published an editorial asking, "Whither the Iraq Crisis?":

"Bush's new plan is certainly a failure, which is evident from the remarks of prominent analysts in major centers of study, congressmen, and even some Republicans and soldiers. They believe that an additional 20,000 troops will not change the situation on-the-ground very much, but will instead increase the daily

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American losses which most recently involved the deaths of 25 American soldiers in two days and the downing of an aircraft. For the American administration, this means that crisis in Iraq is an established fact. There is no other choice but to withdraw gradually, as Congress wants to do as part of the project that it intends to bring to a vote... Resistance to occupation in any country remains legitimate. As for the killing of the innocent, that is something that nobody accepts, either inside or outside Iraq."

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OMANI LEADER AWARDED INTERNATIONAL PEACE PRIZE  
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¶6. "Peaceful Understanding" headlined an editorial in government-owned "Oman" (circulation 38,000) that commented on the awarding of the Jawaharlal Nehru Prize to Sultan Qaboos:

"Peace represents a very high value today and in other centuries; without it, mankind has no meaning, no ability to live on earth, and no way to tolerate all that is involved with life. There is no true creativity without peace and human tolerance, and thus Sultan Qaboos's Jawaharlal Nehru award is the truest example of an enlightened mind and personality that tolerates others. However, this is not the first award of its kind that the Sultan received. He was also awarded the Carter International Peace Prize. This ensures that his role in the world receives attention in an environment that has become increasingly complex, full of wars and assassinations."

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